



Section F: Building Teacher and Community Support for New Compensation Systems

Do surveys indicate that teachers, principals, and the public support new forms of teacher and principal compensation?

Surveys suggest that the public is favorably disposed toward performance pay. The annual Gallup poll of public attitudes queried people about this issue in 2000 and 2004. The 2000 survey results found that 90 percent of the public favored increased pay for teachers who demonstrate high performance (Rose & Gallup, 2000). The 2004 survey asked the public about financial incentives for teachers who teach in high-needs schools. Sixty-five percent of respondents agreed that teachers who teach in schools “identified as needing improvement” should be paid more (Rose & Gallup, 2004).

Surveys also suggest that support for new forms of compensation is increasing among teachers, but is neither uniform nor universal. Positive attitudes toward new forms of compensation tend to be strongest among younger teachers. For example, in a survey among young adults preparing to be teachers, Milanowski (2006) found that most students who planned to teach expressed a preference for some form of performance pay. A Public Agenda survey of teachers with five or fewer years of experience found that 69 percent support differentiated pay in the abstract, though most opposed pay tied to student performance (Farkas, Johnson, & Foleno, 2000).

A Public Agenda poll conducted for The Teaching Commission found that 85 percent of teachers and 72 percent of principals said that providing financial incentives would help to attract and retain high-quality teachers (Public Agenda, 2004, cited in The Teaching Commission, 2004).

An extensive Public Agenda 2003 poll of teachers nationwide found that teachers gave mixed reviews to performance pay, and that their answers varied depending upon the type of incentive. Seventy percent of teachers favor paying more to teachers in low-performing schools. Sixty-seven percent believe it is a good idea to provide financial incentives to teachers who “consistently work harder, putting in more time and effort than other teachers.” This same poll found that 63 percent of teachers are in favor of paying more to teachers who teach difficult classes in hard-to-staff schools, 62 percent support paying financial incentives to teachers who consistently receive outstanding evaluations from their principals, and 57 percent favor paying more to teachers who earn certification through the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (Farkas, Johnson & Duffett, 2003).

However, only 42 percent of the teachers surveyed by Public Agenda favor paying more to teachers in shortage areas such as mathematics and science. Only 38 percent support financial incentives for teachers whose students score consistently higher on standardized tests (Farkas et al., 2003).

In addition, the egalitarianism of the teaching culture is evident in the Public Agenda survey. Sixty-three percent of teachers say that they fear that “merit pay” would foster unhealthy competition and jealousy among teachers. Fifty-two percent say such a system also would lead to principals playing favorites by rewarding those teachers who are loyal to them or do not rock the boat (Farkas et al., 2003).

Goldhaber, DeArmond, and DeBurgomaster (2007) admit that the body of research about teacher attitudes about performance pay paints a somewhat confusing picture about teachers’ views: “depending on the poll, [teachers] are either for or against it.” They propose that one reason why opinion polls have yielded somewhat inconsistent results is that only a few of these studies have examined how teacher attitudes vary by individual and by workplace characteristics. Ballou and Podgursky’s (1993) analysis of the national Schools and Staffing Survey was one of the first studies to examine the effect of these variables on teacher attitudes. Some of their findings were as one might expect. For example, teachers who had previously received performance pay tended to support it; private school teachers held more favorable opinions about it than did public school teachers; and female teachers and more experienced teachers tended to oppose it.

However, Ballou and Podgursky’s analyses also yielded a number of surprises that challenged the widely held belief that most teachers oppose performance pay. For example, contrary to the conventional wisdom that teachers in districts with low base pay would oppose performance awards, the level of pay in such districts appeared to have no effect on teacher attitudes. Contrary to the common belief in the profession that performance pay would demoralize teachers who did not receive financial awards, nonrecipients in districts that used performance pay were not hostile toward it. In fact, they were generally more supportive of performance pay than teachers in districts that did not use it. And contrary to conventional wisdom that teachers of low-performing students would oppose performance pay as unfair, the researchers found that teachers of disadvantaged and low-achieving students were more supportive of performance pay than most teachers.

In a more recent survey of teachers in Washington state, Goldhaber et al. (2007) examined how teacher attitudes about different pay and incentive reforms varied by individual and by workplace characteristics. They, too, found that teacher opinion was not uniform. Overall, nearly 75 percent of teachers favored higher pay for teachers who work in hard-to-staff schools. In contrast, only 17 percent favored performance pay.

Moreover, the level of support for performance pay varied significantly among subgroups. High school teachers, for example, were more supportive of performance pay than were elementary teachers. On the other hand, female teachers and those with more experience were less supportive of performance pay, a finding consistent with that of Ballou and Podgursky. Teachers who identified themselves as members of teachers’ unions also were less supportive of performance pay. Teachers were more likely to support performance pay if they had a high degree of confidence in their principal, but were less likely to support performance pay if they had a greater sense of trust and respect for their fellow teachers than in their principal. Teacher support for other types of pay reforms and incentives also varied by individual and by workplace characteristics.

These findings strongly suggest that districts and states should carefully survey teacher opinion before attempting to adopt new pay systems. Although support for new forms of compensation generally is growing, preferences for different types of pay systems differ substantially among teachers and vary both by individual and by workplace characteristics. Goldhaber et al. (2007) recommend that “policymakers interested in implementing compensation reforms should think carefully about where (and how) they place their bets.” They conclude that differences in teachers’ attitudes and beliefs suggest that new teacher pay plans may well be more likely to succeed if they allow teachers to opt in and if they introduce more popular compensation reforms first.

References

- Ballou, D., & Podgursky, M. (1993). Teachers’ attitudes toward merit pay: Examining conventional wisdom. *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, 47(1), 50–61.
- Farkas, S., Johnson, J., & Duffett, A. (2003). *Stand by me: What teachers really think about unions, merit pay, and other professional matters*. New York: Public Agenda.
- Farkas, S., Johnson, J., & Foleno, T. (2000). *A sense of calling: Who teaches and why*. New York: Public Agenda.
- Goldhaber, D., DeArmond, M., & DeBurgomaster, S. (2007). *Teacher attitudes about compensation reform: Implications for reform implementation*. (Working Paper 20). Seattle, WA: Center on Reinventing Public Education, University of Washington. Retrieved December 7, 2007, from http://www.schoolfinanceredesign.org/pub/pdf/wp20_goldhaber.pdf
- Milanowski, A. (2006). *Performance pay system preferences of students preparing to be teachers*. (WCER Working Paper No. 2006-8). Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin-Madison, Wisconsin Center for Education Research. Retrieved December 7, 2007, from http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/publications/working_papers/Working_Paper_No_2006_08.pdf
- Public Agenda. (2004). *An assessment of survey data on attitudes about teaching, including the views of parents, administrators, teachers, and the general public*. New York: Author. Retrieved December 7, 2007, from http://www.publicagenda.com/research/pdfs/attitudes_about_teaching.pdf
- Rose, L. C., & Gallup, A. M. (2000, September). *The 31st annual Phi Delta Kappan Gallup poll of the public’s attitudes toward public schools*. Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa International.
- Rose, L. C., & Gallup, A. M. (2004). *The 36th annual Phi Delta Kappan/Gallup poll of the public’s attitudes toward public schools*. Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa International. Retrieved December 7, 2007, from <http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/k0409pol.htm>
- The Teaching Commission. (2004). *Teaching at risk: A call to action*. New York: Author. Retrieved December 7, 2007, from <http://ftp.ets.org/pub/corp/tcreport.pdf>

This synthesis of key research studies was written by:

Cynthia D. Prince, Vanderbilt University; Julia Koppich, Ph.D., J. Koppich and Associates; Tamara Morse Azar, Westat; Monica Bhatt, Learning Point Associates; and Peter J. Witham, Vanderbilt University.

We are grateful to Michael Podgursky, University of Missouri, and Anthony Milanowski, University of Wisconsin-Madison, for their helpful comments and suggestions.